



Bethel Search & Rescue
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Pretty but Deadly: open water shining in the morning light

Moose feeding near a large open water (black area at lower ½ of picture) area across from Bogus

12.5.17 BSAR AERIAL RIVER SURVEY:*

“Uncountable”

Summary:

Today BSAR members flew with U.S.F.W.S pilot Robert Sundown to do an aerial survey of River conditions.

The area flown was from the mouth of the Johnson River to George Morgan’s old fish camp 8 miles above Kalskag – about 130 River miles.

The focus of this flight was to get an overview of the number of and location of open water areas so that Kuskokwim Search & Rescue teams could start planning for marking them.

The number of open holes is uncountable at this time.



Open Again: this is the same area in Kuskokuak Slough where we lost 3 People in 2014

Besides the overall unusual number of open holes for early December the following was noted:

- **The unusual number of holes below Napakiak to the mouth of Johnson River - there are at least 6. They are all in the middle or towards the north side of the River.**
- **The closest open hole to Bethel is near the Bethel Bluffs – there are more from the upper end of the Gweek Island to the Y**
- **The unusual number of BIG open holes in Kuskokuak – especially from the Y to Kwethluk – there are 3 in this stretch and many more upstream of Kwethluk.**
- **The main stem Kuskokwim River below Tuluksak is unpassable at this time. Two open holes reach out to each other from both the west and east banks with only a very narrow patch of ice between them. The short cut slough below Nuukpuq (the fish camps) is wide open – bank to bank.**
- **While there are many areas open that are commonly open there is much more open water in areas we haven't seen before.**
- **None of the open holes observed today are making new ice – it's still too warm out.**

The following pictures are just a small sample of the number of open holes in the Kuskokwim:



The Mouth of Johnson River is at the top left - more holes upstream



Danger Close to Home: open hole just above the Bethel Bluffs



Huge Open Hole in Front of Kinegak's Fish Camp at the Lower End of Kuskokuak Slough below Kwethluk



And Right above it - ANOTHER ONE



*And above that - A 3rd ONE! - ALL BELOW KWETHLUK - **THERE ARE MANY MORE FARTHER UP KUSKOKWUAK SLOUGH...***



... Like this one just up around the bend from the mouth of Kwethluk River

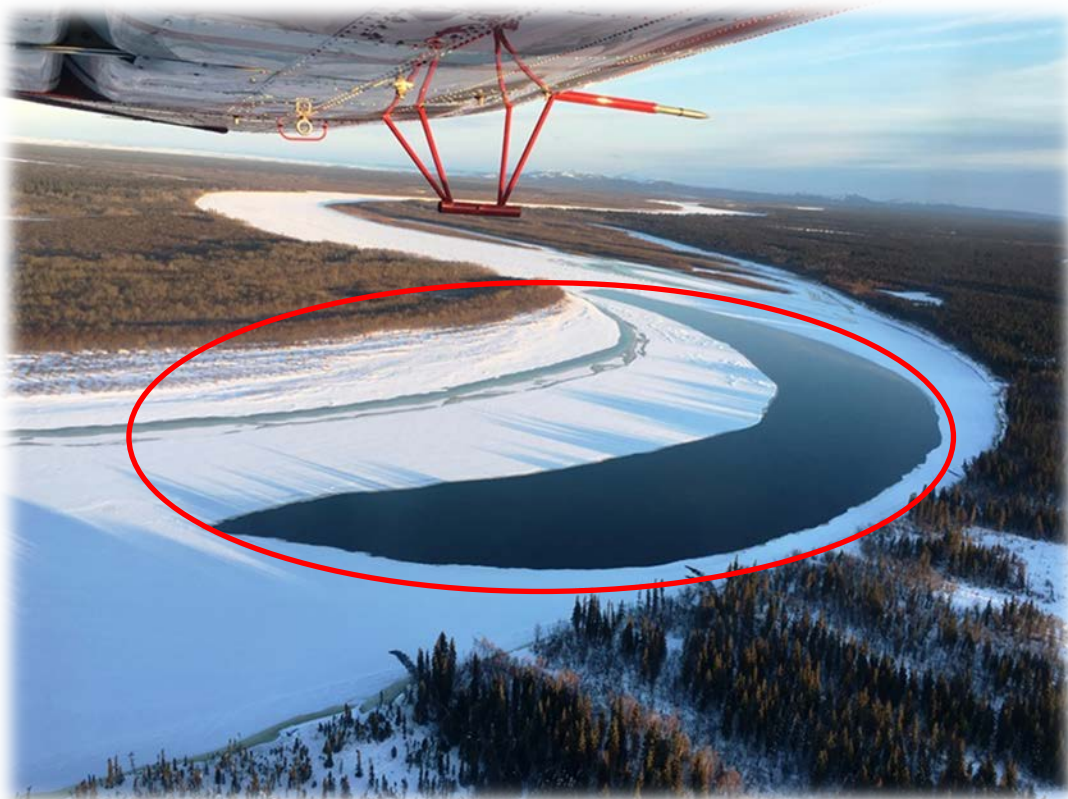
The next two pictures show the most DANGEROUS area we observed in our 130 miles flight:



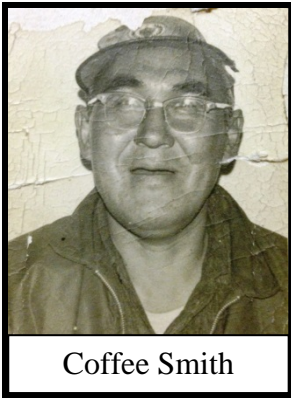
No Where to Run: This is the Kuskokwim River below Tuluksak – where the short cut slough enters main channel There is no safe place to make a River trail at this time



Even the short cut slough below the Tuluksak Fish Camps is wide open – also Macivik Slough is wide open



A Look Further Up: Big Open Hole at Coffee's Bend 10 miles below Kalskag – not unusual to see one here



Coffee Smith

Coffee's Bend was named after this man: John "Coffee" Smith who used to have his fish camp on the north side at the top of the bend.



Robert Sundown, long time USFWS Pilot

Closing:

This is much more open water than we should be seeing for the first week of December. It looks like the back trails will continue to be critical for safe winter travel for a while yet.

We did notice one important trail change since our 12.3.17 River Report: due to heavy overflow in Oscarville Slough the trail to Napasiak and Oscarville has now switched over to the main River.

A big thank you goes to Robert Sundown, Manno Rodgers, and the United States Fish & Wildlife Service for their support of safe winter travel in our region!

That's the report.

Thank you, and Safe Travels from BSAR.

***Please note that this report is for informational purposes only. It is not an advisory that it is safe to travel.**